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SENATORS VIEWING SOVIET SPY EFFORTS

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 11 — Prompted by the widening Navy spy case, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence announced today that it had begun a comprehensive investigation of Soviet espionage efforts against the United States.

The investigation will examine American counterintelligence efforts and "the implications for national security growing out of the Walker case," according to the committee's chairman, Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota.

The Government alleges that a retired naval communications specialist, John A. Walker Jr., ran the largest espionage network uncovered in the United States in 30 years.

As part of a similar inquiry, the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Information, Justice and Agriculture said it would hold hearings beginning next week on United States counterintelligence.

New Concerns Raised

The ranking Democrat on the Senate panel, Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, said in an interview that the arrest of Mr. Walker and three other men had raised new concern in Congress.

"How many other cases like this are there sitting out there?" he asked. "There are about 1,000 Soviet intelligence officers in this country, and we have to assume the rest of them are out there doing something."

According to a written statement, the committee wants to know why a growing number of Americans have been arrested on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.

The statement said the committee would try to determine the "changes in the extent of Soviet espionage operations both within the United States and against U.S. installations and interests overseas."

The chairman of the House panel,

Representative Glenn English, Democrat of Oklahoma, has scheduled a hearing for Monday on "the whole area of counterintelligence." Officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Defense Department and the General Accounting are to testify.

Mr. English said that while the Walker case would not be the focus of the hearings, "obviously it will be discussed."

'Growing Threat' Seen

"There is reason to believe that espionage is a growing threat," he said. "We also want to try to determine if too much information is being classified, and whether this, in turn, has led to too many people receiving security clearance."

Senator Leahy said the Senate investigation was a bipartisan effort. "Both sides are concerned," he said. "What we are going to do is take a very close look at an extraordinarily important issue."

He said the Navy would come in for close scrutiny. The four men arrested in the Walker case are all current or former Navy employees.

"In my estimation, there seems to be a real effort being made now by some in the Navy to downplay this case," the Senator said. "That strikes me as very much a cover-your-backside situation. They know they were extremely negligent in the case, and I don't want a cover-up of anyone's negligence."

Meanwhile, Mr. Walker's former wife, Barbara Joy Crowley Walker, said in an interview published today that she had begun a nightly prayer vigil for her 22-year-old son, Michael, who has also been charged with espionage in the case.

She said she could understand why Michael, a yeoman aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz, might have turned to espionage. "When you have Johnny Walker badgering you all the time, I can understand why he did it, if he did it," she said.

Mrs. Walker, who has acknowledged that she provided the tip that led to the arrest of her son and former husband, said in the interview with The Cape Cod Times that the case had taken its toll on her family.

Her daughter Margaret, 27, an artist living in Norfolk, Va., is "emotionally hurting," Mrs. Walker said.

Of Rachel Walker, Michael's wife, Mrs. Walker said, "She seems to be doing very well." But she added, "Of course we all break down."

She said that she had become angry with the heavy coverage of the case by reporters, who converged daily on her home in West Dennis, Mass. "All I want from these people," she said, referring to reporters, "is for them to pray for my son."